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A ‘new’ walking pilgrimage: performance and meaning on the North-Wales Pilgrim’s Way

A ‘new’ walking pilgrimage: performance and meaning on the North-Wales Pilgrim’s Way

Drawing on discussions of pilgrimage as a landscape-based practice, this paper explores understandings and experiences of the recently developed North Wales Pilgrim’s Way (*Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru*). A focus on this new trail considers how a walking pilgrimage combines physical activity, personal and spiritual encounters, and natural and spiritual landscapes Accounts of pilgrim experiences and photographs demonstrate how journeys on the North Wales Pilgrim’s Way enable participants to forge connections with the natural environment and local heritage, as well as the emotional-spiritual aspects of their lives. The paper finds that meaning is generated by participants in performing the path, highlighting the distinct role of walking pilgrimages in human-landscape interactions. ~~Drawing on discussions of pilgrimage as an embodied landscape-based practice, this paper explores experiences of the recently developed North Wales Pilgrim’s Way (*Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru*). It examines how a walking pilgrimage is a distinct form of activity that combines physical activity, personal and spiritual encounters, and natural and spiritual landscapes. This study contributes to the literature on the growth of walking pilgrimages, which incorporate medieval and (re)invented paths, and their cultural surroundings. Accounts of pilgrim experiences and photographs demonstrate how these liminal journeys on the North Wales Pilgrim’s Way enable participants to forge embodied connections with the natural environment and local heritage, as well as the emotional-spiritual aspects of their lives. The paper finds that meaning is generated by participants in performing the path, highlighting the distinct role of walking pilgrimages in shaping how people engage with world.~~

Keywords: pilgrimage; walking; spiritual; cultural heritage; ~~embodiment~~path; Wales

Introduction

> After the stillness of St Sannan's church, I strolled through Llansannan passing the rural post office and small shops before heading off-road through a farmyard. Leaving an idyllic hamlet on a bright May morning, the trail leads me through lush meadows on the River Aled and then into a picture-perfect woodland with bluebells in full bloom [Figure 1]. It was timeless and captivating. I had left the rest

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of the world long behind. (Research diary, 18th May 2017). ~~We've always been 'long-distance walkers', but inspired by doing the Camino de Santiago to seek out the extra dimension of pilgrimage. Martyn (Anglican).~~

<Insert Figure 1 around here>

Trekking along the North Wales Pilgrim's Way (NWPW), or *Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru*, I entered into the landscape appreciating its cultural, spiritual, and natural elements. The path invited a certain type of walking as I attuned to the surroundings visiting parish churches, ruined monasteries, villages, remote valleys, and a selection of rural and littoral areas. Although there is a network of prominent landscape-based pilgrimages across Europe, this trail was recently created presenting me with an opportunity to engage with an emerging route. This paper is the result of my walking and researching the NWPW to consider how it is understood and experience as a ~~This participant's account of the North Wales Pilgrim's Way or *Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru* encapsulates the complexities of the trail as a performative act and the cultural-spiritual framework. Martyn understands the Welsh path as a part of a larger European pilgrimage tradition, and while he foreground his participation in terms of walking, he also feels it necessary to acknowledge the additional meanings involved. He reveals a distinct form of embodied practice located both in the immediacies of the path and broader appreciations. In this paper, I explore these threads by engaging with how walking the North Wales Pilgrim's Way is a located and substantial form~~ of human-landscape interaction.

~~Increased access to transport systems and communications have enabled a~~ Walking pilgrimages - that is, landscape-based routes in which travelling to the site is the primary focus - have become very popular in the Western world as meaningful

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personal and communal journeys that enable opportunities for emotional and spiritual reflection (Coleman & Eade, 2012; Davidsson Bremborg, 2013; Nilsson, 2018). ~~growth in pilgrimages globally, with walking trails becoming especially relevant in the Western world (Davidsson Bremborg, 2013). They build on both the renewal of pilgrimage and expanding interest in walking as a health and leisure practice to produce an appealing combination of outdoor activity, engagements with cultural and natural environments, and spiritual capacities (Maddrell & della Dora, 2013). Participants value these paths as meaningful personal and communal journeys that enable opportunities for personal and religious reflection, especially in post-secular contexts (Coleman & Eade, 2012; Nilsson, 2018).~~ The ~~North Wales Pilgrim's Way~~NWPW ~~(NWPW or the Way) has been developed~~was founded in 2011 ~~in this context~~ to provide locals and visitors with a pilgrimage opportunity embedded in the Welsh landscape. It is a 215-kilometre route connecting medieval Basingwerk Abbey in the north-east to Bardsey Island (*Ynys Enlli*) at the end of the Llŷn peninsula (*Penrhyn Llŷn)* (Stevens, 2016). The trail uses public paths to connect rural communities, and religious and heritage sites across Wales in the creation of a spiritual and tourist amenity.

~~I examine the meaningful and multifaceted nature of walking pilgrimage located in cultural and spiritual landscapes using the experiences of performing the NWPW.~~ Informed by the common priorities of pilgrimage, walking, and landscape studies, the paper aims to examine the motivations and experiences of people who walk this trail. As a new route, it presents an interesting study to consider how it is understood and how meanings are generated. Unlike more established paths, the NWPW's character has not yet settled down. I explore the case study using accounts collected from research postcards sent by walkers, my own documentation of the route, and available guide and promotional materials. Regardless of the path's recentness, it is still valued as physical

journeys through the landscape which facilitates a range of emotional and spiritual journeys. ~~the paper shows how within the embodied practices of pilgrimage people become immersed in the surrounding environments through corporeal and metaphysical registers. Analysis of participants' accounts, fieldwork documentations, and promotional materials demonstrates how the physical journey *in* and *through* the landscape facilitates more than representational emotional and spiritual journeys through which pilgrims encounter aspects of themselves and their beliefs. A focus on this path as a new trail enables me to assess how walking, as a practice and experience, is framed and lived in relation to pilgrimage, spiritual motifs, and historical and rural landscapes. More generally, trekking and different types of wandering have become respected as being beneficial for overall wellbeing, and are important tourist and recreational amenities that offer authentic and nature-based experiences (Hall *et al*., 2017). Researchers advancing the interdisciplinary field of pilgrimage studies have demonstrated how the activity's tropes still resonate as meaningful spiritual-emotional journeys (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Gale *et al*., 2016). This~~ My discussion advances understandings of walking pilgrimages as layered performances that generated meaning in a meshwork of place, performance, and context. ~~the meeting of participants and place.~~

~~I draw on original research of the NWPW, a 215 kilometre route connecting medieval Basingwerk Abbey in the north-east to Bardsey Island (*Ynys Enlli*) at the end of the Llŷn peninsula (*Penrhyn Llŷn)* (Stevens, 2016). Founded in 2011 in response to the growing popularity of walking pilgrimages, the trail uses public paths to connect rural communities, and religious and heritage sites across rural Wales in the creation of a spiritual and tourist amenity. In just a few years, it has been built up with local support from religious and civil bodies to produce a route that is attracting more participants~~

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~~annually. This case study provides insight into the motivations and experiences of people who choose to walk this new trail ingrained in the Welsh landscape.~~

The paper highlights how walking pilgrimages are a specific form of human-landscape relations that create meanings through ~~embodied spatial practices~~the interaction of people and place. The argument begins with a consideration of the significant development of walking pilgrimages, alongside a review of the intersections of pilgrimage, walking, and landscape studies. ~~The method~~The next section outlines the NWPW as a case study and describes the qualitative methodology pursued ~~section provides an overview of the NWPW, and the research and field techniques adopted in the study~~. Accounts of walking the path illustrate how meaning and understanding are forged by individuals and groups through their interactions with Welsh spiritual and cultural settings. The conclusion highlights the distinct role of ~~walking~~ landscape-based pilgrimages and ~~the~~ outlines further research in this ~~evolving and~~ expanding ~~arena~~area.

Walking Pilgrimages

~~Research on pilgrimage has followed an overall trajectory from 'a general and comprehensive phenomenon to its analysis as an individual, hence more pluralistic, entity' (Collins-Kreiner 2010, p.444). This has involved the development of mega-theories and universal typologies, which give way to more specific frameworks of analysis that delve into the essence of the phenomenon (Pazos, 2012). The field is an interdisciplinary endeavour with anthropologists, geographers, historians, and social scientists scholars providing theoretical frameworks and vivid accounts recognising pilgrimage as a socio-political activity as well as a cultural and spiritual endeavour (Coleman and Eade, 2012; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Reader, 2014).~~

~~This foundation has equipped researchers with the conceptual and methodological tools~~

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~~to examine the recent revival of interest in pilgrimage.~~ Research on pilgrimage is well-established across the social sciences but it has been given a new impetus with the ~~The~~ significant growth in paths that retrace medieval routes or connect sites of significance ~~have been one of the most noteworthy developments~~ (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Oviedo *et al*., 2014). This phenomenon is encapsulated in the Camino de Santiago~~, a network of tracks that were transformed from a minor way in the 1980s to a major international amenity through investment from national and European regional funding and tourist promotion~~ (Havard, 2017; Lois-González, 2013; Lois-González, Fernández, & Lopez, 2016~~Lois-González *et al*., 2015~~). Charting this development has been a key focus of pilgrimage studies displaying the importance of these performed journeys.

Walking pilgrimages align with post-secular sensibilities as potentially meaningful activities embedded in cultural and spiritual landscapes that can be appreciated, or even consumed, differently by individuals and groups (Badone, 2014; Kato & Progano, 2017; Lois-González, Fernández, & Lopez, 2016~~Lois-González *et al*., 2016~~; Nilsson, 2018; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016). The loose nature of the routes can incorporate and blend religious-spiritual motivations and religious tourism, alongside recreational walking~~ers~~ and ~~those~~ people marking life events (Gale *et al*., 2016; Kato & Progano, 2017; Lois-González & Santos, 2015; Maddrell, 2013; Redick, 2018). However, these paths are still ~~being walked~~trekked for traditional reasons, with the expedition being a sacrificial and ritualised activity in numerous religious contexts (Das & Islam, 2017; Mujtaba Husein, 2018; Scriven, 2014). Also, there has been extensive discussions on the commonalities and distinctions between tourists and pilgrims, with the categories blurring and parting in different contexts and practices (Coleman and Eade, 2004; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; della Dora, 2012; Liutikas 2017).

Pilgrimage motifs intertwine to present a ~~ritualised~~ structure for personal or spiritual transformation (Osterrieth, 1997) through encounters on the expedition, be it spiritual, social, or natural, that prompt a reaffirmation of beliefs or emotional states (Scriven, 2018). Ellen Badone's (2014) study of *Tro Breiz*—a Breton route which shares many similarities of the NWPW—found that the path contained rich interconnect elements that help generate authentic pilgrimage experiences for participants~~, including physical challenge, fellowship, liminality, and exploring heritage and faith~~. Walking pilgrimages are also adding a new layer of facilities and interpretation to contemporary cultural and physical landscapes, as well as producing distinct political economies (Duda, 2014; Guichard-Anguis, 2011).

Tropes of the journey and interactions with the natural environment combine with the intentional mindfulness and slowed pace of pilgrimages to present an enticing and inclusive framework (Badone, 2014; Coleman & Eade, 2012). This insight links with and re-configures the concept of liminality, which has been considered one of the key aspects of pilgrimage since Victor and Edith Turner's (1978) theorisations. It describes the detached nature of the journey as participants enter a transitionary state enabling more meaningful experiences. While the liminality can be idealised by overlooking social and political realities, it still articulates much of the appeal of walking pilgrimages as a separation from the demands of quotidian life and the potential for spiritual or emotional encounters (Slavin, 2003; Wigley, 2016.). Connected to it is their notion of *communitas* which accounts for the fellowships and ~~motifs~~ feelings of equality that can pervade on the routes. The camaraderie of the shared journey enables different interactions and the potential for intense temporary relationships (Liutikas 2017; Maddrell 2013). ~~Walking p~~Pilgrimages can be appreciated as material and

immaterial infrastructures that enable individual and shared experiences (see Amin, 2014).

The act of walking itself ~~must also be fully appreciated in these pilgrimages~~is also important in these journeys. Walking has been rising in popularity serving broader societal and health functions (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). ~~Research across the social sciences has recognised that walking~~It is understood ~~not merely a physical activity but also~~as an embodied ~~spatial~~ practice that weaves together physiological, psychological, and communal benefits (Gatrell, 2013; Hall *et al*., 2017; Macpherson, 2017), as well as being an embodied act, a political exploit, and subjectivity (Lorimer, 2011; Liu, 2018; Lund, 2012; Middleton 2010).~~.~~ It is a means of entering a slower pace and engaging with surrounding natural and social worlds. ~~Walking is also appreciated as an embodied act, a political exploit, and subjectivity (Lorimer, 2011; Liu, 2018; Lund, 2012; Middleton 2010).~~

My focus on participants' located experiences draws on research which has foreground the ~~embodied and~~ practiced dimensions of walking. Ingold (2007) highlighted the embodied nature of movement as an interaction with our environments, while Macpherson's (2017) work with visually impaired people vividly conveys the richness of walking engagements with landscapes beyond the optic. Rybråten *et al*. (2019) attending to the phenomenological aspects of everyday walking demonstrates the range of experiences involved, and the need to appreciate them. In addition, a range of papers considering walking as a ~~research practice and~~ methodology illustrate how the performance enables distinct forms of interaction with landscapes (Macpherson, 2016; Pink *et al*., 2010; Ramsden, 2017; Warren, 2017). Broadening appreciations for walking enable fresh analytical opportunities to examine Western Christian pilgrimage trails as

providing ~~an ideal~~a cultural and natural structure in which meaningful walking can occur.

I examine the interactions of people and landscape through the performance of pilgrimage. As ~~These performative pilgrim paths have recently been examined as immersive embodied engagements with the trail and landscapes.~~ Kato & Progano (2017, p.247) explain, 'Walking tourism along the pilgrimage routes may be seen as a "co-creation process and development process by walkers, surrounding communities and the environment".' ~~Informed by discussions of the more-than representational dimensions of spiritual experiences and landscapes which have emphasised the practiced and affective interconnections of people and places in sacred contexts~~ This theme has been explored through considerations of spiritual experiences that arise through engagements with landscapes that have cultural or natural numinous qualities (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009; Pile *et al*., 2019~~; Yorgason & della Dora, 2009~~). They bring participants into an embodied pace in-conjunction with the trail (Egan, 2010; Harris, 2019; Maddrell & della Dora, 2013; Slavin, 2003). ~~Maddrell (2011, p.17) explains 'the pilgrim encounters the landscape visually and materially, engaging with it kinetically, sensually and imaginatively … literally and metaphorically marking and being marked by it'.~~ It is an involved and lively engagement that generates larger meanings (Lois-González, Fernández, & Lopez, 2016; Maddrell 2011; Rountree 2006). Through journeying itself, significances and spiritual encounters arise; the performance is foundational to this process (Couch, 2016). In her study of Swedish pilgrimages, Anna Davidsson Bremborg (2013, p.557) found that the sanctity of the route was 'defined along the trail by the pilgrims individually' with the outdoor life ~~and nature~~ serving 'as an instrument for spiritual experiences'. These research vectors help position my study as an

examination of participants' experiences in and through the landscape ~~within a pilgrimage context~~.

Pilgrimage, walking, and pilgrimage studies dovetail in appreciations of human-landscape relationships as a form of inter-involvement of place, activity, and meaning linked through performance (see Wylie, 2007). These processual understandings centre on the role of walking as a ~~n embodied~~ practice that unites participants and place through social, natural, and spiritual encounters. Tim Ingold's (2007) term "meshwork" illustrates how a path can be forged by walkers as the activity, the physical routes, and the new layers of significance and experience merge together in weaving trails in the landscape. ~~Recent research in these areas emphasises the importance of analysis focused on the experiences and understandings that flow from active engagements with landscapes and the worlds created in these encounters.~~ Using the NWPW as a case study, this paper ~~builds on these strands to examine~~examines how ~~distinct forms~~types of meaning are forged by participants on a new walking pilgrimage in and through Welsh cultural, spiritual, and natural landscapes.

Case study and ~~M~~method

North Wales Pilgrim's Way / Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru

The NWPW is a 215-kilometre route along a series of public paths that links different contemporary and historical spiritual sites from the medieval Basingwerk Abbey, via antiquities, parish churches, and cathedrals, to Bardsey Island (Figure 2). It is a new trail that was developed in 2011 by clergy and members of the Church in Wales (a province of the Anglican Communion), in conjunction with local communities, civil society organisations, and regional tourist and recreational bodies.

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~~The NWPW was initially develop in 2011 by clergy and members of the Church in Wales (a province of the Anglican Communion), in conjunction with local communities, civil society organisations, and regional tourist and recreational bodies.~~ The NWPW intentionally replicates the Camino de Santiago model of spiritual tourism that brought economic renewal to rural areas of northern Iberia (see Lois-González, Fernández, & Lopez, 2016; Lois-González & Santos, 2015)~~In response to the benefits the Camino de Santiago had brought to the rural areas of northern Iberia.~~ It~~, this path~~ was envisaged as a spiritual and ~~tourist~~ recreational facility that could support ~~local communities and~~ regional development across Wales. In addition, it~~It~~ is one of a network of paths established across Western Europe since the 1990s, including St Cuthbert's Way and St Oswald's Way in Northumbria (Abraham, 2016), St Olav's Way in Norway (Thue, 2008), *Tóchar Phadraig* and St Declan's Way in Ireland (Pilgrim Paths, 2019), and *Tro Breiz* in Britany (Badone, 2014). Like these other routes, the NWPW merges the popularity of walking pilgrimages with the spiritual and cultural heritage of Wales and the appeal of its varied landscapes. Narratives on the ~~Way's~~ website and guidebook reinforces its multifaceted character with practical advice on walking and accommodation, alongside the promotion of tourist attractions and encouragements to engage with nature and poetry inspired by the area:

> Today a route crossing North Wales has been mapped and waymarked, linking ancient churches dedicated to the saints of the 6th century whose gentle faith, entwined with a sense of the beauty and wonder of nature, still echoes with us today. (North Wales Pilgrim's Way, 2019).

Attentive to larger developments in this field, the NWPW has been developed as a contemporary route located in an ancient past drawing on Welsh and Celtic themes

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which are embedded in the environment.

~~<Insert Figure 1 around here>~~

Starting at the ruins of Basingwerk Abbey, adjacent to St Winefride's holy well (a prominent Roman Catholic shrine), the trail uses public paths to connect current and historical religious sites before overlapping with the Wales Coast Path (Llwybr Arfordir Cymru) on the Llŷn peninsula ending at Bardsey Island (*Ynys Enlli*), which was a major medieval pilgrimage centre. It has features of a pilgrimage trail with branded way-makers (Figure 1), and guidebooks and maps (Potter, 2019; Stevens, 2016). In addition, a Pilgrim Passport—an element of many walking pilgrimages—is available for people to mark with stamps in churches along the w~~W~~ay. These elements present a familiar architecture for participants, ~~in particular those~~those who have performed other routes.

Methods

This paper aims to examine the motivations and experiences of people who walk the NWPW as a new route. A qualitative methodology combines an auto-ethnographic approach with short questionnaires completed by participants and literature about the path. Building on different strands of pilgrimage studies, it focuses on understanding the nature of the path as a practice that links people and landscape in the generation of spiritual and emotional encounters (Kato & Progano, 2017; Maddrell, 2011; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016).

In May 2017, ~~In approaching the NWPW, I have adopted a methodology with two primary strands. First,~~ I walked sections of the ~~path~~ route across ~~several days~~ two weeks to record its character and the infrastructure, and to interact with participants as well as the communities hosting the trackway. Direct involvement in pilgrimage has become established as a means of gaining ~~This approach builds on an established~~

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~~practice used by researchers directly participating in pilgrimages to gain~~ rigorous ethnographic and located understandings (Anderson, 2019; Davidsson Bremborg, 2013; Maddrell & della Dora, 2013; Maddrell & Scriven, 2016). Located and qualitative insights are presented by interaction with participants and the environments to help ~~ground and~~ develop~~ed~~ the analysis. I maintained a research diary and photographed the route, attending to its different components. These materials form my contextual understanding for this study with the paper drawing primarily from the second method.

I distributed 'research open-questionnaire postcards' following Avril Maddrell's (2011) development of this method in her work on the Isle of Man. She gave the postcards to participants on a pilgrimage to overcome the inability to survey them during the ~~practice~~journey. I adapted the approach slightly to reach a larger number of walkers than I could meet on my fieldwork. In co-operation with the parish clergy, stamped~~,~~ addressed postcards were left in two churches along the route – St Digain's Church Llangernyw and St Beuno's church, Clynnog Fawr - during July 2017 ~~-~~for any participants to voluntarily take, fill out, and send. One side explained the project and the reverse asked basic demographic questions, and invited people to describe their experiences and motivations for doing the walk (figure 3~~2~~ *(identifying information removed for review)*). It presented a means of people sharing their experiences during the journey enabling appreciations from within the pilgrimage landscapes. However, limited socio-demographic information was gathered as a result of the public nature of the medium and the small amount of space available.

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The analysis for this paper draws on responses from twenty-nine (29) postcards, which were received between July 2017 and May 2018, and specifically quotes ~~seven~~ seven (7~~7~~), as illustrative examples. These insights were combined with the fieldwork

materials, online features, and books about the route to present a fuller understanding of this ~~performed~~ pilgrimage landscape. Manual analytical coding was used to organise, examine, and interpret the different types of data. This approach builds on the deployment of coding in qualitative work enabling the 'researcher to communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data' (Basit, 2003, p.152). Axial coding facilitated critical thematic considerations highlighting patterns, correspondences, and frictions in experiences and understandings of the NWPW (Cope, 2009). The analysis divided statements into broad categories (motivations, perceptions, experiences) and compared them on different themes (Walking/leisure activity, heritage, identity, spiritual, religious, fellowship, and other) to enable an examination of understandings and experiences of the trail. Quotations frrm the participants reflecting the themes are used to structure the discussion, enabling their perspectives to illustrate the character of the NWPW. Collectively, this approach presents a located means to engage with the ~~Way~~ path as a contemporary walking pilgrimage by understanding the motivations and accounts of participants.

Results and Discussion

Motivations to walking the ~~Way~~NWPW

~~Research concerned with examining pilgrimage on personal scales has shown that a~~ Examining the reasons why people walk the route reveals how this new trail is approached. Motivations are animating forces that form the substance of understanding and representing the path, adding to its layers (Ingold 2007). A broad range of stimuli prompt people to go on pilgrimage. The range of inspirations cited by participants indicate that the NWPW is performing a similar function to other pilgrim trails

accommodating different personal, social, and spiritual interests (see Coleman and Eade, 2012; Gale *et al*., 2016). The postcards highlighted different aspects: they positioned it as a walking trail that offered a pilgrimage in Britain with opportunities to connect with historic and religious landscapes.

In exploring the motivations, it was noteworthy that its character was seen as marking the trail out from other routes. Pilgrimage implies challenge, liminality, and substantial engagement with the surroundings (Coleman and Eade, 2012; Lois-González & Santos, 2015). While these features can be found in other forms of walking, they are consciously centred in pilgrimage. On my journey, these aspects called on me to consider and explore the landscape, calling to mind the stories embedded in different sites. This sentiment is expressed in one participant's postcard:

> I enjoy long distance walking. I also like walking pilgrim paths. I have walked the Camino Frances in Spain and Le Chemin Du Puy in France. I like the additional dimension that walking as a pilgrim brings to the walk. I like to immerse myself in a simple lifestyle carrying as little as possible. I like visiting churches along the way. – Rachel

Rachel locates the NWPW as a pilgrim path that presents a different kind of walking. It is a 'simple lifestyle', which aligns with understandings of pilgrimages as counter-cultural to western materialist orientations (Davidsson Bremborg, 2013). This idea incorporates a broader sensibility of being pilgrim which adds a supplementary dimension. In this case, 'carrying as little as possible' can be read as both a practical and a metaphorical description, since Rachel represents a liminal state, detaching herself from unnecessary burdens and opening up to encountering the Welsh landscapes.

~~broad range of stimuli prompt people to undertake these journeys (Coleman and Eade, 2012; Gale *et al*., 2016). These reasons shape how people approach and frame their walking experience of the pilgrimage landscapes. In the postcards, participations~~

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~~highlighted different aspects; they positioned it as a walking trail that offered a pilgrimage in Britain which offered opportunities to connect with historic and religious landscapes along the way.~~

Similar sentiments were expressed by other respondents who wrote that they had completed complementary long-distance walks and were enticed by the NWPW. For Ruth, who did not mention a religious affiliation, walking is her primary motivation, but performing pilgrim paths has a lasting significance for her and her friends: ~~Responses indicate an overlap between people who engaged in long-distance walking and those who were enticed to the Way and other pilgrim routes. It is a porous space in which these distinct, yet related, strands blend. For Ruth, who did not write about any religious affiliation on her postcard, walking is her primary motivation, but performing pilgrim paths has a lasting significance for her and her friends:~~

> We walked St Cuthbert's Way & also (some) of the Camino de Santiago. This seemed a next choice. We are a group of 6 friends, four of whom attend the same CofE [Church of England] Church … We are also keen walkers, members of E. Cheshire Ramblers (2 of us). We planned and booked the accommodation (B&B) well in advance. – Ruth

The ~~Way~~route, which is compared to the more prominent Camino, serves as a post-secular facility that has religious and secular aspects resting together comfortably (see Nilsson and Tesfahuney, 2016). For this group, the NWPW is another ~~Ruth's account captures an essence of~~ contemporary walking pilgrimage~~s~~: ~~-~~it is an exercise in walking but one that intentionally takes place in a pilgrim landscape. ~~The choice to follow this route, along with St Cuthbert's Way and the Camino, is significant.~~

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~~Pilgrim paths are positioned as being different from other trails. The tropes of pilgrimage carry connotations of challenge and the voluntary inclusion of additional~~

~~elements, as well as liminality's deliberate and substantial engagement with the surroundings (Coleman and Eade, 2012; Lois González & Santos, 2015). While these features can be found in other forms of walking, they are consciously centred in pilgrimage. This sentiment is expressed in one participant's postcard:~~

> ~~I enjoy long distance walking. I also like walking pilgrim paths. I have walked the Camino Frances in Spain and Le Chemin Du Puy in France. I like the additional dimension that walking as a pilgrim brings to the walk. I like to immerse myself in a simple lifestyle carrying as little as possible. I like visiting churches along the way. – Rachel~~

~~Like Ruth's account above, Rachel mentions that she has walked several pilgrim paths and understands the Way in this vein; however, she emphasises walking as a form of 'simple lifestyle' which aligns with understandings of pilgrimages as counter-cultural to western materialist orientations (Davidsson Bremborg, 2013). This idea incorporates a broader sensibility of being pilgrim which adds a supplementary dimension to the journey. In this case, 'carrying as little as possible' can be read as both a practical and a metaphorical description, since Rachel embodies a liminal state, detaching herself from unnecessary burdens and opening up to encountering the Welsh landscapes.~~

A related point raised by participants values the NWPW as a means of exploring the landscape as the meeting place of natural, cultural, and spiritual heritage. This combination is an engaging opportunity for those who choose to follow the trail.~~The Way is valued as an infrastructure that innately blends physical activity and the cultural and natural landscape, and that occurs in the context of a pilgrimage and its numinous potential. This combination is an engaging and enticing opportunity for those who choose to follow the trail.~~ An emphasis on history is part of a larger pattern of individuals using pilgrim trails to connect with their personal or national heritage (see Anderson, 2019). One of the participants summarises the appeal as:

A spiritual discernment journey.
A good long walk.
To know more the history + landscape of N Wales
– Catherine (Roman Catholic)

Catherine's prioritising of the spiritual shows how it can serve as a site of ~~conveys an understanding of the Way as a located capacity to engage in active~~ personal reflection. As Dewsbury & Cloke (2009) discussed, spiritual landscapes are intersections of the material and numinous which can be felt by people. Her journey is ~~necessarily~~ embedded both in the act of walking and the heritage of the region. ~~This emphasis on Welsh history, also mentioned by other participants, is part of a larger patterns of individuals using pilgrim trails to connect with their personal or national heritage (see Anderson, 2019).~~ This practice enables located ~~and embodied~~ connections with identity and ancestry through the ~~materiality of the~~ landscape~~s as worlds of potential spiritual and cultural encounter~~.

This selection of motivations illustrate that the NWPW has already come to fulfil a role comparable to other pilgrim trails in western Europe. Participants mention different cultural and spiritual reasons that align with examinations of these routes as being both secular and sacred (Nilsson, 2018). It is fitted into a larger network with pre-existing understandings and themes being grafted onto northern Wales. These landscape-based trackways hold an appeal for people who benefit from completing one and seek similar experiences. A general attraction is manifest in the specifics of the NWPW. In this way, the NWPW is valued as a Welsh pilgrimage.

Underlying each of the motivations is an appreciation of a walking pilgrimage as a categorical and purposeful act. It is, as Avril Maddrell (2013) put it, a type of 'more-than-walking'. The activity presents a distinct means of engaging with the landscape, and its natural, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Although it overlaps with other trails,

such as the Wales Coast Path, the NWPW is perceived as having additional qualities to link with larger themes. Despite its relative newness, the path is valued as a means of travelling through north Wales in a manner that entwines with the spaces and heritage along the way.

~~Undertaking the Way is a purposeful act. Weaving across the north Wales countryside and along the coast, it is a multifaceted arena for those who have chosen to trek it. It is understood as a corporeal performance to interact with rural and littoral environments, while also having a pilgrimage character which is comparable with more prominent routes. The NWPW forms part of a larger tapestry manifesting a regional expression of this broader phenomenon.~~

~~Similar to other walking routes, the range of spiritual motives highlight the post-secular nature with participants highlighting the more numinous aspects (Nilsson, 2018). Even those who declare as having a faith affiliation are more comfortable emphasising their rationale in spiritual terms. They appreciate walking as an activity that enables connections beyond the normal to more ethereal elements that can be found on the path (see Slavin, 2003). These attunements show how the Way is valued as "more-than-walking" (after Maddrell, 2013) offering asomatous potential through the activity. These insights leads to considerations of what encounters and meanings were generated in the process.~~

Forging meaning on the ~~Way~~NWPW

~~Understandings of the route are informed by the larger cultural-historical contexts, as well as by specific materials that promote the Way and guide people. It is, however, in the~~The abiding meanings associated with the trail are generated in individual and group practices ~~that individuals and groups create their own abiding meanings~~ (Couch, 2016;

Davidsson Bremborg, 2013). Actions or even rituals help manifest values and identities (Liutikas 2017). Ingold's (2007) meshwork concept is especially useful in considering different accounts of walking the route as a rich nexus of people, practice, and place. ~~As a new~~Considering the recent origins of the route, the role of ~~the~~ performance in the generation of appreciations takes on an additional significance.

<Insert figure ~~5~~4 around here>

Pilgrimage is a physical and metaphysical journey that contains the potential for personal transformation (Maddrell, 2013; Scriven, 2018). While these journeys can be idealised in commentary or promotional materials, a ~~key~~ component of pilgrimage's growth has been the resonance of these routes to offer ~~forms of~~ personal and/or spiritual renewal. The image of the hiking figure wandering with a purpose along a worn groove is encapsulated in this response:

> I walked the Pilgrim's Way alone from Holywell to Bardsey. The Way was inspiring, difficult, magical, and spiritual. I learned how to trust, be quiet, and find joy in each step of the way. – Barbara (Christian/Buddhist)

The route was clearly a substantial venture ~~for Barbara~~. Her description embodies the ritualised journey of the pilgrim who enters a liminal state and returns transformed (Osterrieth, 1997), while also aligning with understandings of walking as well-being (Rybråten *et al*., 2019). I had similar experiences in sections, as I walked alone through undulating countryside, I entered an enveloping rhythm that shaped my interactions with my surroundings. I can appreciate how Barbara's ~~Her practice created an enveloping rhythm that shaped her interactions with her surroundings and with the world more broadly. Navigating and negotiating the NWPW~~journey through this landscape enabled her to find new self-assurances ~~and comfort in aspects of herself~~ (see Lund, 2012). ~~Her enactment was an exploration and reflection through an active~~

~~synergy with the path.~~

Spiritual elements arise for some participants following the ~~Way~~ NWPW as its immersive nature is felt ~~and interpreted~~ through religious or ethereal lens. Liminalities enabling people to leave everyday concerns behind and instead enlace themselves within the rural landscapes ~~paving the way for numinous episodes~~. The spiritual dimension referred to by others, sometimes in more abstract terms, was viscerally felt by Dave:

> On one level, it was something I did full of interest, encounter, challenge. On another, living being a pilgrim spoke to the deeps of myself and my life story. It was hard, it was fun (especially bivouacking), it was so so satisfying. Strong feelings of gratitude to those who set it up & those who helped me. And, of love for Wales. Its beauty, its magic, its special places. God "turned up" in surprising ways. Each day was a gift, with its own story and insights. – Dave (Liberal Christian)

This vivid account conveys the richness of his experience. It is a religiously charged expedition created in the hurdles of hiking and ~~sleeping out~~sleeping out interlaced with appreciations for the Welsh countryside. Like Barbara, he ~~makes reference~~refers to magical elements as ~~the~~ happenstances ~~and demands of the trail~~ elicit mystical concurrences; ~~however~~yet, for Dave these aspects are manifestations of the presence of God. This encapsulates definitions of a Christian pilgrimage as the quest entails degrees of hardship which are occasion for learning and revelation that built up the competences to meet God (Osterrieth, 1997). Moreover, it continues to resonate as the feature that distinguishes pilgrimages ~~form~~ from other ~~forms~~ types of long-distance walking (Redick, 2018). The NWPW is experienced as a sacred arena brimming with spiritual encounters that renew his faith and appreciation for life.

Pilgrimage is valued as an inherently social exercise, and it is noteworthy that Turner and Turner (1978) saw *communitas* as a key component of the ritual experience. Solidarities formed ~~by and~~ on the route ~~and by common challenges~~ can generate deep~~er~~ bonds, and chance meetings can offer reassurances concerning human nature. For one participant, this aspect stuck as being a noteworthy part of his outing:

> A fantastic walk through beautiful, wild and varied landscapes and some very isolated areas. Many views were breath taking. Great camaraderie amongst our fellow walkers—friendship and fun and hospitality extended to us was consistently warm and helpful. A truly fabulous, uplifting experience. – Nayland (C of E)

A mix of social strands from amity on the route to the generosity of other people merged to give Nayland an emotional boost. The mutual ~~experience~~experiences are central to this process, as it hinges on other walkers sharing the trials forging unit~~i~~es and non-participants appreciating the demands involved. The significance of the ~~Way~~ NWPW is generated through people's interactions with the environment, but also in their interactions with their fellows and in the cumulative located knowledge ~~of the collective walking~~.

For 'faith affiliation' one participant, Bart, wrote 'searching for meaning'. The NWPW helped him access cultural and spiritual landscapes that stimulate and channel his existential curiosity (see Amin, 2014). In different ways, each of the quotes illustrates how fresh understandings are generated on the trail. Walking in landscapes can be an immersive experience (Macpherson, 2017; Rybråten *et al*., 2019). The feelings are inseparable from both the activity and the place as they are generated together in the process. These findings correspond with Badone (2014)'s explorations of the *Tro Breiz* route, where active engagement with the environment created distinct encounters. They also contribute to discussions on value-based tourism that appreciate

how heritage and performance can intersect with place (see Liutikas 2017). In common with other pilgrimages, the physical journeys on the NWPW facilitate metaphysical ones that touch on faith, emotional assurances, fellowships, and appreciations for nature and landscape. ~~In one of the postcards, for 'faith affiliation' one participant, Bart, wrote 'searching for meaning', a response suggesting his quest for a larger life trajectory in which the Way plays a role. The path through cultural and spiritual landscapes stimulates and scaffolds his existential curiosity (see Amin, 2014). Fresh understandings and purposes are generated in this process as the performed search sparks spiritual and emotional effects, forges social links, and permits reflection. As recent considerations of walking and landscapes have highlight it can be an immersive experience (Macpherson, 2017; Rybråten *et al*., 2019). The feelings are inseparable from both the activity and the place as they are generated together in the process. These findings corresponds Badone (2014)'s explorations of the *Tro Breiz* route, where active engagement with the environment generated pilgrimage encounters in the merging of the different aspects. In common with other pilgrimages, the physical journeys on the NWPW facilitate metaphysical ones that touch on faith, emotional assurances, fellowships, and appreciations for nature and landscape.~~

The NWPW can be viewed as a meshwork of interconnecting trails as different meanings are added by each participant, enriching understandings of the route through the landscape (Ingold 2007). Although it is a new trackway, it is woven as an emotional and spiritually dense path in an on-going accumulation of value. Personal experiences, stories of Celtic saints, countryside, and fellowships merge into the path creating a pilgrims' way. Liminality was emplaced on the NWPW in Barbara's trekking, a divine subtext permeated Dave's pilgrimage, and, for Nayland, distinct commonalities and emotional affinities emanated in the shared understanding of the track. These accounts

display the deep strands of meaning that participants found on their completion of the NWPW. ~~These meaningful aspects are additionally noteworthy as the NWPW is a recently developed concept and trail. While it links historical Christian sites through cultural and physical landscapes, as a singular entity it is only a few years in existence; however, the nuances and encounters along the trackway are as poignant and affecting as any other route. Indeed, several participants directly compare or link their completing the Way with other more established and older routes. This feature reinforces an appreciation of the role of walking pilgrimages as an embodied practice through landscapes, and the significances they can generate.~~

~~Each person's encounters with the surfaces and contours of the route cultivate fresh experiences. Liminality was emplaced on the NWPW in Barbara's trekking, a divine subtext permeated Dave's pilgrimage, and, for Nayland, distinct commonalities and emotional affinities emanated in the shared understanding of the track. These accounts display the deep strands of meaning that participants found on their completion of the Way. Using Tim I__ngold's (2007) term, the Way is a kind of "meshwork" consisting of interwoven patterns of paths forged by the participants, the physical routes, and the new layers of significance and experience that all merge together in the process. Embodied and situated understandings emerge in the act of walking the route as sensations, thoughts, and~~s ~~encounters form the pilgrim journey.~~

Conclusion

This paper builds on strands of pilgrimage, walking, and landscape studies to consider the understandings and experiences of the NWPW as a recently established trail. This newness presents an interesting case study to consider how that impacted on participants. My examination shows that, similar to much older and prominent routes,

the NWPW has flexible recreational, cultural, and spiritual capacities. Participants walk the route for a range of different reasons bringing a broader appreciation for pilgrimage that is lived out in the Welsh landscape. Experiences along the route resonate with research into other walking pilgrimages, while remaining distinct to the specifics of the NWPW and the people who walk it. In this regard, it captures an essence of pilgrimage as an open-ended concept that can be applied to a range of geographical contexts~~On the NWPW, local and visiting participants have been granted a fresh opportunity to engage with Welsh landscapes. Conceived as a multifaceted feature to encourage people to travel through and to rural Wales, the path has open and flexible recreational, cultural, and spiritual capacities. It subtly combines active engagement with a natural landscape that has cultural significances and gives space in which is fostered potential for spiritual and/or emotional experiences. Its appeal has resulted in the route growing considerably in both length and popularity since its inception in 2011. Significantly, the Way manifests the distinct contemporary role that walking pilgrimages serve as meaningful expeditions inherently ingrained in a larger framework of social relevance~~.

In practical terms, this is manifest in the increasing popularity of the route, which helps achieve the aim of its creators in bringing more people to rural Wales through a cultural and spiritual amenity. While in theoretical terms, it highlights the relevance of the connective experience between landscape and participants that create meaning in their meeting. Distinct personal, emotional, and numinous encounters arise, regardless of the path's recent origins. The sentiments and aesthetics of pilgrimage merge with individual subjectivities and the spiritual and natural heritage of north Wales to generate these journeys. The interplay of these features is the most significant part~~This paper is concerned with examining a walking pilgrimage as a connective experience between landscapes and participants that create meaning in their meeting.~~

~~Through the embodied practices of performing the NWPW distinct personal, emotional, and numinous encounters arise. The Welsh countryside is not merely the physical and conceptual setting for the path, it is the cultural, spiritual, and natural substance of these individual and collective journeys. Building on the overlaps in pilgrimage, walking, and landscape studies, this study illustrates how~~. Concepts such as Tim Ingold's meshwork help articulate these entwinings as meanings are forged through the interactions of people and landscapes. Walking pilgrimages present one means of exploring and unpacking these rich dynamics. ~~the practices of a walking pilgrimage are a multifaceted arena which shape people's understandings and experiences of their surroundings. The approach values individual qualitative accounts of the practice as a dynamic and evolving process.~~

Routes similar to the NWPW have been developed across western Europe requiring greater study of this trend, the people who follow these trails, and the accompanying conceptual and policy implications. ~~As these types of pilgrimage routes continue to develop and grow in number, researchers will need to provide even greater detail on the motivations and experiences of participants, and will need to reflect on the larger theoretical and policy implications for walking practices and their socio-cultural contexts.~~ My focus on the qualitative aspects illustrate the need for work that centres on how pilgrimage ~~paths and~~ landscapes serve ~~as a means to~~to externalise beliefs, express meaning, and create and frame experiences. Further considerations of this type are required to elaborate on the nuances involved to understand how themes, such as (post)secularity, gender, physical capacities, or age, are manifest in landscape-based pilgrimages. Complementing this emphasis, there is a need for more quantitative and sociologically driven work to enable greater comparisons along with appreciation for the macro-developments. ~~Further consideration is required to elaborate on the nuances~~

~~involved with secular and spiritual threads of meaning interweaving personal and shared journeys on these paths. A walking pilgrimage is an intricate process that reconfigures the practice, landscapes, and the conceptual frameworks within the animations of the performance demanding research which can inspect and reflect on these elements and their relationality.~~

The confluence of examinations of pilgrimages, walking, and landscapes highlights how walking pilgrimages are a ~~distinct~~ form of activity that shape the interactions of people and environments. It differs from both other ~~forms~~ types of long-distance trekking and pilgrim activities, provoking spatial researchers to further examine the specific dynamics involved. The NWPW presents one case study among an expanding network of pilgrim trails that are calling on a variety of actors to follow them forging their own journeys within a broader cultural and spiritual structure. Considerations of the personal and mutual motivations involved, and the meaningful experiences ~~generated~~ created can assist in enhancing and variegating understandings of walking pilgrimages as spiritual and cultural activities in and through different landscapes.

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Figure 1. A stile on the route near Llansannan, in north-east Wales, with the NWPW way-maker helping guide participants. In the undulating countryside of this area, the trail leads through farms, meadows, and ~~a~~ woodlands immersing walkers into the rural landscapes.

Figure 2. A map of the NWPW from the route's website based on OpenStreetMap (used under an Open Data Commons Open Database License (ODbL)) (North Wales Pilgrim's Way, 2019).

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Figure 3~~2~~. Research postcards left for participants to take away and fill out along the route at two locations, St Digain's Church Llangernyw and St Beuno's Church, Clynnog Fawr.

Figure 4~~3~~. The ~~Way~~ NWPW follows a centuries-old trackway to St Celynnin's medieval church, Llangelynnin, known as the 'coffin path' as it was the route by which deceased parishioners were carried up to the church. Here the NWPW vividly intersects with aspects of the Welsh historical and spiritual landscapes.

Figure 5~~4~~. On the Llŷn peninsula (*Penrhyn Llŷn*) the ~~Way~~ NWPW overlaps with the Wales Coast Path (*Llwybr Arfordir Cymru*), presenting a different experience as the trail leads to the Bardsey Island (*Ynys Enlli*) a major centre of medieval pilgrimage.